

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE "VEGA."

In the month of December, 1878, Erik had attained the age of twenty, and passed his first examination for his doctor's degree. The learned men of Sweden were greatly excited about the proposed arctic expedition of the navigator Nordenskiöld, and their enthusiasm was shared by a large proportion of the population. After preparing himself for the undertaking by several voyages to the polar regions, and after studying the problem in all its aspects, Nordenskiöld intended to attempt once more to discover the north-east passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, which for three centuries had defied the efforts of all the maritime nations.

The programme for the expedition had been defined by the Swedish navigator, and he announced the reasons which led him to believe that the north-east passage was practicable in summer, and the means by which he hoped to realize this geographical desideratum. The intelligent liberality of two Scandinavian gentlemen, and the assistance of the Swedish government, enabled him to organize his expedition upon a plan which he believed would insure its success.

It was on the 21st of July, 1878, that Nordenskiöld quitted From-sæ, on board of the "Vega," to attempt to reach Behring's Strait by passing to

the north of Russia and Siberia. Lieutenant Palanders, of the Swedish navy, was in command of the vessel, with the instigator of the voyage, and they had also a staff of botanists, geologists, and astronomical doctors.

The "Vega," which had been especially prepared for the expedition under the surveillance of Nordenskiold, was a vessel of five hundred tons, which had been recently built at Bremen, and carried an engine of sixty-horse power. Three ships were to accompany her to successive points on the Siberian coast, which had been previously determined upon. They were all provisioned for a cruise of two years, in case it might be necessary for them to winter in those arctic regions. But Nordenskiold did not conceal his hope of being able to reach Behring's Strait before autumn, on account of his careful arrangements, and all Sweden shared this hope.

They started from the most northerly point of Norway, and the "Vega" reached Nova Zembla on the 29th of July, on the 1st of August the Sea of Kara, and on the 6th of August the mouth of the Gulf Yenisei. On the 9th of August she doubled Cape Schelynshin, or Cape North-East, the extreme point of the continent, which no vessel had hitherto been able to reach. On the 7th of September she cast anchor at the mouth of the Lena, and separated from the third of the vessels which had accompanied her thus far. On the 16th of October a telegraphic dispatch from Irkutsk announced to the world that the expedition had been successful up to this point.

We can imagine the impatience with which the friends of the Swedish navigator waited for the details of the expedition. These details did not reach them until the 1st of December. For if electricity flies over space with the rapidity of thought, it is not the same with the Siberian post. The letters from the "Vega," although deposited in the post-office at Irkutsk, at the same time that the telegraphic message was dispatched, did not reach Sweden until six weeks afterward. But they arrived at last; and on the 5th of December one of the principal newspapers of Sweden published an account of the first part of the expedition, which had been written by a young medical doctor attached to the "Vega."

That same day, at breakfast, Mr. Bredejord was occupied in reading with great interest the details of the voyage, given in four columns, when his eyes fell upon a paragraph which almost upset him. He re-read it attentively, and then read it again; then he arose, and seizing his hat and coat, he rushed to the house of Dr. Schwaryencrona.

"Have you read the correspondence of the 'Vega'?" he cried, as he rushed like a hurricane into the dining-room where the doctor and Kajsa were taking their breakfast.

"I have just commenced it," replied the doctor, "and was intending to finish reading it after breakfast, while I smoked my pipe."

"Then you have not seen!" exclaimed Mr. Bredejord, out of breath. "You do not know what this correspondence contains?"

"No," replied Doctor Schwaryencrona, with perfect calmness.

"Well, listen to this," continued Mr. Bredejord, approaching the window.

"It is the journal of one of your brethren, the aid of the naturalist of the 'Vega.'"

"30th and 31st of July, we entered the strait of Jugor, and cast anchor before a Samoyede village called Chabarova. We landed, and I questioned some of the natives to discover, by Holmgren's method, the extent of their perception of colors. I found that this sense was normally developed among them. Bought of a Samoyede fisherman two magnificent salmon."

"Pardon me," interrupted the doctor; "but is this a charade you are reading to me. I confess I do not see how these details can interest me."

"Ah! they do not interest you?" said Mr. Bredejord, in a triumphant tone. "Well, wait a moment and you will see:

"Bought of a Samoyede fisherman two magnificent salmon, which I have preserved in alcohol, notwithstanding the protestations of our cook. This fisherman fell into the water as he was quitting the ship. They

pulled him out half suffocated and stiffened by the cold, so that he resembled a bar of iron, and he, also, had a serious cut on his head. We were just under way, and they carried him to the infirmary of the "Vega," while still unconscious, undressed him, and put him to bed. They then discovered that this fisherman was an European. He had red hair; his nose had been broken by some accident, and on his chest, on a level with his heart, these words were tattooed: "Patrick O'Donoghane--Cynthia.""

Here Dr. Schwaryencrona uttered a cry of surprise.

"Wait! listen to the rest of it," said Mr. Bredejord; and he continued his reading:

"Being subjected to an energetic massage treatment, he was soon restored to life. But as it was impossible for him to leave us in that condition, we were compelled to take care of him. A fever set in and he became delirious. Our experiment of the appreciation of colors among the Samoyedes, therefore, was frustrated.--3d of August. The fisherman of Chabarova has recovered from the effects of his bath. He appeared to be surprised to find himself on board the "Vega," and en route for Cape Tahelyuskin, but soon became reconciled to his fate. His knowledge of the Ganwyede language may be useful to, us, and we have determined to take him with us on the coast of Siberia. He speaks English with a nasal accent like a Yankee, but pretends to be Scotch, and calls himself Tommy Bowles. He came from Nova Zembla with some fishermen, and he has lived

on these shores for the last twelve years. The name tattooed upon his chest he says, 'is that of one of the friends of his infancy who has been dead for a long time.'

"It is evidently our man," cried the doctor, with great emotion.

"Yes, there can be no doubt of it," answered the lawyer. "The name, the vessel, the description, all prove it; even this choice of a pseudonym Johnny Bowles, and his declaring that Patrick O'Donoghlan was dead, these are superabundant proofs!"

They were both silent, reflecting upon the possible consequences of this discovery."

"How can we go so far in search of him?" said the doctor, at length.

"It will be very difficult, evidently," replied Mr. Bredejord. "But it is something to know that he is alive, and the part of the world where he can be found. And, besides, who can tell what the future may have in store? He may even return to Stockholm in the 'Vega,' and explain all that we wish to find out. If he does not do this, perhaps we may, sooner or later, find an opportunity to communicate with him. Voyages to Nova Zembla will become more frequent, on account of this expedition of the 'Vega.' Ship-owners are already talking about sending every year some vessels to the mouth of the Yenisei."

The discussion of this topic was inexhaustible, and the two friends were still talking about the matter, when Erik arrived from Upsal, at two o'clock. He also had read this great piece of news, and had taken the train for home without losing a moment. But it was a singular fact that he was not joyful, but rather disturbed by this new intelligence.

"Do you know what I am afraid of?" said he to the doctor and Mr. Bredejord. "I fear that some misfortune has happened to the 'Vega.' You know it is now the 5th of December, and you know the leaders of the expedition counted upon arriving at Behring's Strait before October. If this expectation had been realized, we should have heard from her by this time; for she would have reached Japan, or at least Petropaulosk, in the Aleutian Islands, or some station in the Pacific, from which we should have received news of her. The dispatches and letters here came by the way of Irkutsk, and are dated the 7th of September, so that for three entire months we have heard nothing from the 'Vega.' So we must conclude that they did not reach Behring's Strait as soon as they expected, and that she has succumbed to the common fate of all expeditious which for the last three centuries have attempted to discover the north-east passage. This is the deplorable conclusion which I have been compelled to arrive at."

"The 'Vega' might have been obliged to encounter in the Polar regions a great deal which was unforeseen, and she might have been unprovided for such a contingency," replied Dr. Schwaryencrona.

"Evidently; but this is the most favorable hypothesis; and a winter in that region is surrounded by so many dangers that it is equivalent to a shipwreck. In any case, it is an indisputable fact that if we ever have any news of the 'Vega' it will not be possible to do so before next summer."

"Why, how is that?"

"Because, if the 'Vega' has not perished she is inclosed in the ice, and she will not be able, at the best, to extricate herself before June or July."

"That is true," answered Mr. Bredejord.

"What conclusion do you draw from this reasoning?" asked the doctor, disturbed by the sad tone of Erik's voice as he made the announcement.

"The conclusion that it is impossible to wait so long before solving a question which is of such great importance to me."

"What do you want to do? We must submit to what is inevitable."

"Perhaps it only appears to be so," answered Erik. "The letters which have reached us have come across the Arctic Ocean by the way of Irkutsk. Why could I not follow the same route? I would keep close to the coast of Siberia. I would endeavor to communicate with the people of that



country, and find out whether any foreign vessel had been shipwrecked, or was held prisoner among the icebergs. Perhaps I might succeed in finding Nordenskiöld, and Patrick O'Donoghán. It is an enterprise worth undertaking."

"In the middle of winter?"

"Why not? It is the most favorable season for traveling in sleighs in that latitude."

"Yes; but you forget that you are not there yet, and that it will be spring before you could get there."

"That is true," said Erik, who was compelled to recognize the force of this argument. He sat with his eyes fixed on the floor, absorbed in thought.

"No, matter," said he suddenly; "Nordenskiöld must be found, and with him Patrick O'Donoghán. They shall be, or it will not be my fault."

Erik's plan was a very simple one. He proposed to write an anonymous letter to the leading newspapers of Stockholm, and thus proclaim his fears as to the fate of the "Vega." Had she been shipwrecked, or was she held a prisoner by icebergs, and he concluded his communication by representing how important it was that some vessel should be sent to her assistance in the latter case.

The truth of his reasoning was so apparent, and the interest in the expedition so general, that the young student of Upsal was certain that the question would be warmly discussed in scientific circles.

But the effect of his letter was beyond his highest expectations. All the newspapers without exception expressed their approval of his proposition while commenting upon his communication.

Public opinion was unanimously in favor of fitting out a relief expedition. Commercial men, manufacturers, the members of schools and colleges, the judicial corps--in fact, all classes voluntarily contributed to the enterprise. A rich ship-owner offered to equip a vessel at his own expense, to go to the relief of the "Vega;" and he named it the "Nordenskiöld."

The enthusiasm increased as days passed without bringing any intelligence of the "Vega." By the end of December, the subscription had reached a considerable sum. Dr. Schwaryencrona and Mr. Bredejord had headed the list with a subscription of ten thousand kroners each. They were members of the committee who had chosen Erik for their secretary.

The latter was in fact the soul of the undertaking. His ardor, his modesty, his evident ability with regard to all questions relative to the expedition, which he studied untiringly, soon acquired for him a most decided influence. From the first he did not conceal the fact that

it was his dream to take part in the enterprise, if only as a simple sailor, and that he had a supreme and personal interest in the matter. This only gave the greater weight to the excellent suggestions which he made to the originators of the expedition, and he personally directed all the preparatory labors.

It was agreed that a second vessel should accompany the "Nordenskiöld," and that it should be like the "Vega," a steamship. Nordenskiöld himself had demonstrated that the principal cause of the failure of previous attempts had been the employment of sailing vessels. Arctic navigators, especially when on an exploring expedition, must not be dependent upon the wind, but must be able to force their way speedily through a difficult or perilous pass--and above all, always be able to take the open sea, which it was often impossible to do with a sailing vessel.

This fundamental point having been established, it was decided also to cover the vessel with a lining of green oak, six inches thick, and to divide it into compartments, so that it would be better able to resist a blow from the ice. They were also desirous that she should not draw too much water, and that all her arrangements should be so made as to enable her to carry a full supply of coal. Among the offers which were made to the committee, was a vessel of one hundred and forty tons, which had been recently built at Bremen, and which had a crew of eighteen men, who could easily maneuver her. She was a schooner, but while she carried her masts, she also was furnished with an engine of eighty horse-power. One of her boilers was so arranged that it could burn oil or fat, which was

easily procurable in the arctic regions, in case their coal should fail. The schooner protected by its lining of oak, was further strengthened by transverse beams, so as to offer the greatest possible resistance to the pressure of the ice. Lastly, the front of it was armed with a spur of steel, to enable it to break its way through a thick field of ice. The vessel when placed on the stocks, was named the "Alaska," on account of the direction which she was destined to take. It had been decided that while the "Nordenskiold" should pursue the same route which the "Vega" had followed, that the second vessel should take an opposite direction around the world, and gain the Siberian Ocean, by the island of Alaska and Behring's Straits. The chances of meeting the Swedish expedition, or of discovering traces of her if she had perished would thus, they thought, be double, for while one vessel followed on her track, the other would, as it were, precede her.

Erik, who had been the originator of this plan, had often asked himself which of the vessels he had better join, and he had finally concluded to attach himself to the second.

The "Nordenskiold," he said to himself, would follow the same course as the "Vega." It was therefore necessary that she should be equally successful in making the first part of the voyage, and double Cape Tchelynskin, but they might not be able to do this, since it had only been accomplished once. Besides, the last news which they had received from the "Vega," she was only two or three hundred leagues from Behring's Straits; therefore they would have a better chance of meeting

her. The "Nordenskiöld" might follow her for many months without overtaking her. But the other vessel could hardly fail to meet her, if she was still in existence.

The principal thing in Erik's eyes was to reach the "Vega" as quickly as possible, in order to meet Patrick O'Donoghane without delay.

The doctor and Mr. Bredejord warmly approved of his motives when he explained them to them.

The work of preparing the "Alaska" was pushed on as rapidly as possible. Her provisions, equipments, and the clothing, were all carefully chosen, for they profited by the experience of former Arctic explorers. Her crew were all experienced seamen, who had been inured to cold by frequent fishing voyages to Iceland and Greenland. Lastly, the captain chosen by the committee, was an officer of the Swedish marines, then in the employment of a maritime company, and well known on account of his voyages to the Arctic Ocean; his name was Lieutenant Marsilas. He chose for his first lieutenant Erik himself, who seemed designed for the position by the energy he had displayed in the service of the expedition, and who was also qualified by his diploma. The second and third officers were tried seamen, Mr. Bosewitz and Mr. Kjellguist.

The "Alaska" carried some explosive material in order to break the ice, if it should be necessary, and abundant provisions of an anti-scorbutic character, in order to preserve the officers and crew from the common

Arctic maladies. The vessel was furnished with a heater, in order to preserve an even temperature, and also with a portable observatory called a "raven's nest," which they could hoist to the top of the highest mast, in those regions where they meet with floating ice, to signal the approach of icebergs.

By Erik's proposal this observatory contained a powerful electric light, which at night could illuminate the route of the "Alaska." Seven small boats, of which two were whale-boats, a steam-cutter, six sledges, snow-shoes for each of the crew, four Gatling cannons and thirty guns, with the necessary ammunition, were stored away on board. These preparations were approaching an end, when Mr. Hersebom and his son Otto arrived from Noroe with their large dog Kaas, and solicited the favor of being employed as seamen on board of the "Alaska." They knew from a letter of Erik's the strong personal interest which he had in this voyage, and they wished to share its dangers with him.

Mr. Hersebom spoke of the value of his experience as a fisherman on the coast of Greenland, and of the usefulness of his dog Kaas, who could be used as a leader of the dogs which would be necessary to draw the sledges. Otto had only his good health, his herculean strength, and his devotion to the cause to recommend him. Thanks to the influence of the doctor and Mr. Bredejord, they were all three engaged by the committee.

By the beginning of February, 1879, all was ready. The "Alaska" had therefore five months before the first of June to reach Behring's

Straits, which was accounted the most favorable season for the exploration. They intended also to take the most direct route, that is to say, through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Indian Ocean, and the China Seas, stopping successively to take in coal at Gibraltar, Aden, Colombo in Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong, Yokohama, and Petropaulosk.

From all these stations the "Alaska" was to telegraph to Stockholm, and it was also agreed that, if in the meantime any news was received of the "Vega," they should not fail to send information.

The voyage of the "Alaska," although intended primarily for an arctic exploration, would begin by a voyage through tropical seas, and along the continents most favored by the sun. The programme had not, however, been arranged to give them pleasure; it was the result of an imperative necessity, since they must reach Behring's Straits by the shortest route and remain in telegraphic communication with Stockholm up to the last moment. But a serious difficulty threatened to retard the expedition. They had spent so much in equipping the vessel that the funds which were indispensable for the success of the enterprise, began to run short. They would require considerable to purchase coal, and for other incidental expenses.

A new appeal for money became necessary. As soon as it was issued the committee received two letters simultaneously.

One was from Mr. Malarius, the public teacher of Noroe, and laureate of the Botanical Society. It contained a check for one hundred kroners, and begged that he might be attached to the expedition as the assistant naturalist of the "Alaska."

The other contained a check for twenty-five thousand kroners, with this laconic note:

"For the voyage of the 'Alaska,' from Mr. Tudor Brown, on condition that he is received as a passenger."